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Chapter I

The Land and Its Inhabitants

The appearance of the land. -- Location of the tribes. -- General characteristics of the natives. -- Maternal feelings. -- The fetishes. -- Religious beliefs. -- Cult of the dead. -- The Mbumo. -- Medicine.

[37] The area between the Congo, the Kasai, and the Kwango is covered with tall grass interspersed with stunted trees and a few small forests whose verdant canopy rises majestically over a boundless plain. A curtain of trees stretches along the rivers and gradually thins out as one penetrates into the interior. The path [38] beaten by the regular passage of endless columns of natives, walking Indian file, winds sadly and monotonously across these lightly rolling plains. During the rainy season the grass, whose stems grow as high as two or two and a half meters, obstructs the view. During the dry season, destroyed by brush fires, it has given way to a blackish-yellow plain from which all life seems to have been [5&1] banished. From time to [6] time, at distances of 30 and sometimes 40 kilometers apart, we find groupings of huts, surrounded by a few manioc fields, [Fig. 1 appears here] banana groves, and sometimes small plots of maize and peanuts. Upon our arrival, [40] the men look at us without concern, the mistrustful women hide [Fig. 2 appears here] in their huts or take refuge in the forest and fields, and the less timid children stare at us with the innocence characteristic of their age. [7]

Beyond the Kasai, in the region of the Fimi, around Lake Leopold II, and along the Lukenie, the bush gives way to the forest, damp, swampy, dark, and mysterious.

[37] At the confluence of the Fimi and the Kasai, a vast swampy [36] area stretches as far as the eye can see, bare of all arborescent vegetation, crossed by innumerable channels which are narrow and shallow during the dry season and wide to the point of covering practically the whole region during the rainy season.

[text continues on p. 3]

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The few groups of natives who inhabit this region have built their villages along the river on raised ground, safe from the periodic floods.

In the forest region the villages seem to be scattered purely at random.

The huts are built in the center of a large clearing, surrounded by manioc plots and banana groves which are encircled in the distance by uncleared forest.

Such is the region that we crossed from Stanley Pool to Kasai-Kwango, from the Fimi to Lake Leopold II, and over the entire basin of the Lukenie.

The first peoples we encountered there belong to the Batéke [Teke] group. Their territory lies around Stanley Pool and extends to the north as far as the Lufimi. Beyond that live the Basfumungo [Fumu], also called Basfugumo, Basfumuka, Baumbo, or simply Basfumu.

North of the Kasai and along the banks of the Congo live the Beyansi [Yansi] or Bobangi. Their neighbors to the east, the Beboma [Boma] or Babuma, occupy the whole of the confluence of the Fimi and the Kasai, up to the left bank of the lower Kwango.

The Wadia [Dia] live to the north of the Beboma between Nioki and Kutu and extend along the Boriempa and the western shore of Lake Leopold II up to the territory of the Mosengere [Sengele].

The region occupied by the Basakata [Sakata] stretches along the left bank of the Lukenie-Fimi between Bokoro and Moleke.

The Mosengere or Monsengere are settled along the Olonga-Uele in the region of Bongo. Northwest of this group we encountered the Bakutu [Kutu], whose territory extends beyond the boundaries of the Lake Leopold II district. [8]

Fig. 3
Bateke Woman and Child.

The Bolia occupy the country northeast of Bongo as far as the Bolia-Kiri region.

The Tumba [Ntomba] are settled all along the eastern shore